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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on three areas considered indexes of an immigrant's commitment to U.S. society: citizenship, homeownership, English language acquisition, and intermarriage. Data come from the 1990 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample and the June 1994 and the 1998 Current Population Survey. Data analysis indicates that in 1990, 76.4 percent of immigrants who had resided in the United States for 40 years were naturalized citizens. Within 20 years of arrival, 60.9 percent of immigrants lived in owner-occupied housing in 1990. Within 10 years of arriving in the United States, more than three out of four immigrants spoke English well or very well in 1990. Less than 2 percent of long-established immigrants over age 39 years spoke no English at all. Intermarriage rates for second- and third-generation Asians and Latinos were extraordinarily high. Fully one-third of third-generation Hispanic American women, and 41 percent of third-generation Asian American women, were married outside of their ethnic group. The results suggest that, according to data on people's everyday lives, today's immigrants assimilate into U.S. society much the way earlier waves of newcomers did. (Adjunct ERIC clearinghouse for ESL literacy education.) (SM)

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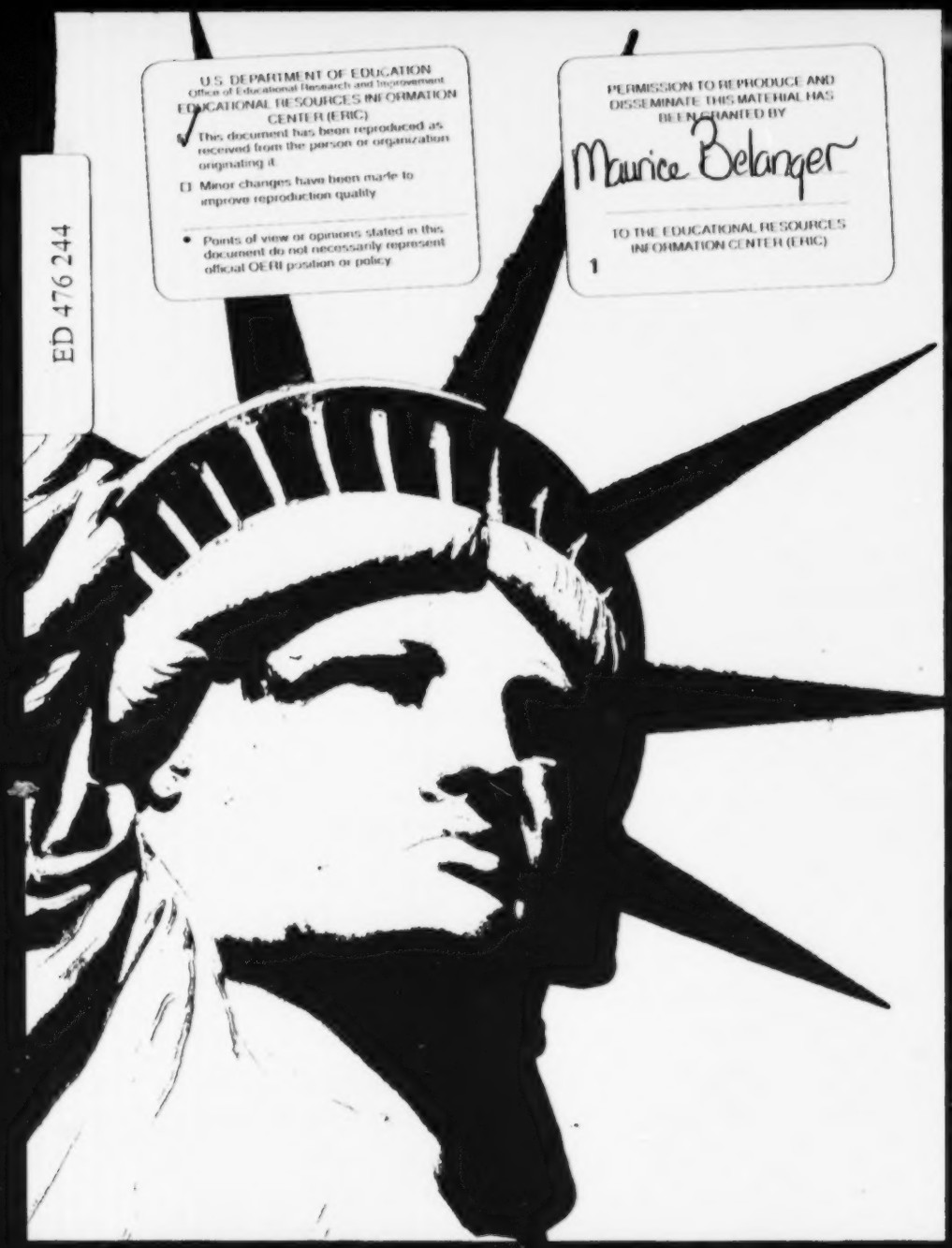

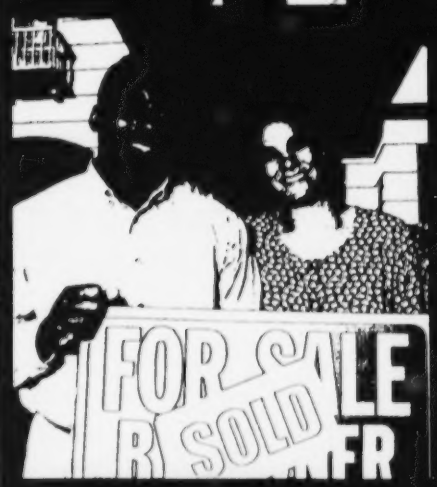

From Newcomers to New Americans:

The Successful Integration of Immigrants into American Society

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Executive Summary

Background

Anyone subjected to the intellectual debates on immigration of the past twenty years might easily conclude that immigrant assimilation is a thing of the past. At one extreme, right-wing nativists fear a collapse of the nation's common culture, asserting that today's immigrants are unwilling to become part and parcel of the nation's social fabric. At the other end of the spectrum, left-wing academic multiculturalists argue that today's immigrants should not be expected to assimilate into the culture they themselves have absorbed.

Fortunately, most immigrants do not conduct their lives according to the trends of café society. Contemporary immigrant families overwhelmingly do what newcomers have always done: slowly, often painfully, but quite assuredly, embrace the cultural norms that are part of life in the United States.

Assimilation is not about immigrants rejecting their past, but about people of different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds coming to believe that they are part of an overarching American family.

Assimilation into life in the U.S. has never required the obliteration of ethnic identity. Instead, it involves newcomers of differing backgrounds adopting basic concepts of American life--equality under the law, due process, and economic opportunity. Put another way, assimilation is not about immigrants rejecting their past, but about people of different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds coming to believe that they are part of an overarching American family.

Assimilation is not now, and has never been, an instant transformation in which an immigrant suddenly becomes a "full-fledged American." Rather, it is a long-term, sometimes multigenerational, process. To some extent, it is never-ending: almost all Americans carry some of their ethnic past with them. Furthermore, U.S. culture constantly changes and adapts to immigrants, just as immigrants adapt to it. The nation remains, in the words of sociologist Nathan Glazer, "the permanently unfinished country."

John Yim
Huntsville, Alabama

John Yim came to the U.S. in 1977 from Hong Kong. He enlisted in the U.S. Army from 1993 to 1995 and describes the years he served with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) as the "cradle" of his U.S. citizenship. He proudly became a U.S. citizen in 1994.

Yim takes his citizenship seriously. He says that his credo is *"dedication to work, loyalty to my adopted country, respect for our American flag and what it stands for: democracy and freedom."*

Methodology

This study focuses on four areas that we consider indices of an immigrant's commitment to American society—citizenship, homeownership, English language acquisition, and intermarriage. In assessing these four quantifiable indices of assimilation, we have chosen to rely on the 1990 U.S. census. Although conducted nine years ago, the decennial census is still the most reliable source of data on these indices. It is based on a large sample, which allows us to extract data on individual immigrant groups with great confidence. For intermarriage data, we also use the June 1994 Current Population Survey, which tracks generational differences. For the most recent totals of the numbers of immigrants and where they reside in the United States, we rely exclusively on the 1998 Current Population Survey.

Overview of Findings

Citizenship

In 1990, more than three-quarters (76.4%) of immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for forty years were naturalized citizens.

Citizenship is the most symbolic sign of attachment to the United States. Whereas immigration itself can be reactive—a response to pressures in the home country—becoming a citizen is quintessentially proactive. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that naturalized citizens tend to have a positive outlook on the United States. Once naturalized, immigrants also take on a more active role in the civic life of the country.

Whereas immigration itself can be reactive—a response to pressures in the home country—becoming a citizen is quintessentially proactive.

The longer immigrants reside in the United States, the more likely they are to become U.S. citizens. While rates vary among different groups, in 1990 three-quarters (76.4%) of immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for forty years were naturalized. In the past few years, political conditions in the United States have effected a change in attitudes toward naturalization. The anti-immigrant campaigns in California and in Congress in the middle and late 1990s have been partly responsible for the largest rush to naturalization in the history of the United States.

Hasu Shah
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Hasu Shah emigrated from India in 1964 to go to school at Tennessee Technical University. After graduation he became an engineer for the state of Pennsylvania for 18 years. In 1984 he decided to go into business for himself. With his entire life savings he bought a small 11-room motel. He has since turned this small motel into a real estate conglomerate which owns 10 hotels, 3 elderly living facilities and various apartment complexes—employing almost 500 Americans. Shah, now President of Hersha Enterprises, Ltd., remarks, "*Not only do I own a home for my family, I am providing homes and shelter for many more who need it.*"

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Within twenty years of arrival in the U.S., well over half (60.9%) of immigrants lived in owner-occupied housing in 1990.

Homeownership is perhaps the most visible and durable sign that immigrants have set down roots in the United States. For most Americans—both native- and foreign-born—buying a house is the principal means of accumulating wealth. There is no greater symbol of stability, permanence, and faith in the future.

Immigrants are making significant strides toward homeownership. Within twenty years of arrival in the U.S., six out of ten immigrants lived in owner-occupied housing in 1990. In thirteen of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, two out of three households were owner-occupied after twenty-six years of residence in the U.S.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Within ten years of arriving in the U.S., more than three out of four immigrants spoke English well or very well in 1990. Less than 2% of long-established forty-year-plus immigrants spoke no English at all.

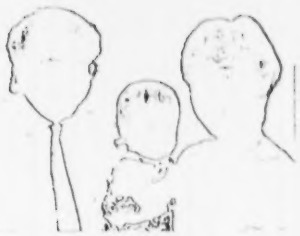
Immigrants are much better prepared in English than is commonly thought. In 1990, a majority (58.2%) of immigrants who had arrived in the previous five years reported that they already spoke English "well" or "very well." Within ten years of arrival, a little more than three-quarters (76.3%) of immigrants spoke English with high proficiency. Only 1.7% of long-established immigrants reported speaking no English at all in 1990.

Taking a look at the second and third generations, virtually all children of immigrants spoke English proficiently. In most cases, the native language of immigrants is completely lost after a few generations in the United States. In 1990, 98.3% of Asian-American children reported speaking English "well," "very well," or exclusively, and 95.7% of third generation Latino children spoke English

Tatyana Arbit
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Tatyana Arbit came as a refugee to the U.S. from Russia in 1989 speaking no English. Two months later she enrolled in English as a Second Language skill classes and her life began to change. "*Movie theaters, a job, simple conversation with a food store clerk, and even new American friends became possible,*" says Arbit.

Not content to just learn the language for herself, she also taught English to Russian children in three Milwaukee public schools and now works helping resettle refugees. "*I want to help newcomers find their ticket to success. Acquiring English skills will set the tone for the rest of their lives,*" Arbit says.



Muzaffar A. Chishti and Helene Lauffer
New York, New York

Muzaffar Chishti emigrated from Kashmir, India in 1973. A lawyer by profession, Chishti married Helene Lauffer, a native New Yorker and a highly regarded social service professional. They come from different faiths; he is Muslim and she is Jewish. They married in 1994 and have a young daughter. *"In our marriage of two very different backgrounds, we celebrate America's diversity, and our daughter, Maryam, will help define a new blended American identity,"* Chishti says.

"well," "very well," or exclusively. The idea of non-English speaking clusters remaining over generations is simply untrue. Sociologists have even designated the U.S. a "language graveyard."

INTERMARRIAGE

Intermarriage rates for second- and third-generation Asians and Latinos are extraordinarily high.

Intermarriage is not only a sign that a person has transcended the ethnic segregation—both coerced and self-imposed—of the first years of immigration, it is also the most potent example of how Americans forge a common national experience out of a diverse cultural past. Intermarried couples and their children are living testaments to the fundamental tolerance underpinning a multi-ethnic society. Clearly, intermarriage illustrates the extent to which ethnicity no longer serves to separate one American from another.

Both foreign-born Asians and foreign-born Hispanics have higher rates of intermarriage than do U.S.-born whites and blacks. By the third generation, intermarriage rates for Asians and Latinos, the two largest ethnic groups among contemporary immigrants, are extremely high. Fully one-third of third-generation Hispanic women are married to non-Hispanics, and 41% of third-generation Asian American women have non-Asian spouses.

CONCLUSION

All available evidence shows that today's immigrants assimilate into U.S. society much the way earlier waves of newcomers did. The proof exists not in the rhetoric of the heated battles over immigration, but in the data revealing the often overlooked, everyday lives of contemporary immigrants and their families.

Reflections on Assimilation

The United States of America at the end of the second millennium is perhaps the most culturally influential nation in history. Its language has long since become the *lingua franca* of business and diplomacy. Its popular culture—movies and music, in particular—permeates even the most remote and isolated points on earth. Children in an Andean village in Peru can identify Arnold Schwarzenegger. Country singer Garth Brooks has devoted fans on the tiny island of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic Ocean.

Yet however mighty a cultural superpower America may be, some Americans fear that immigrants living within the United States remain somehow immune to the nation's assimilative power. Intellectuals of various stripes increasingly embrace this notion, some as a validation of their own anti-Americanism, others in horror over the possible collapse of the nation's common culture. Calling assimilation "America's Dirty Little Secret," scholar Richard Alba contends that it has been replaced by the slogans of multiculturalism.[1] Right-wing nativists question the ability and willingness of today's immigrants to become part and parcel of the nation's social fabric. Left-wing academic multiculturalists argue that, unlike those of centuries past, today's immigrants should not be expected to assimilate into the culture of their host country. Anyone subjected to these debates might easily conclude that assimilation has little future in twenty-first century America.

> Most immigrant families today do what newcomers have always done: slowly, often painfully, but quite assuredly, embrace the cultural norms that are part of life in the United States.

Fortunately, most immigrants are not affected by these debates—they do not work in or live around universities or participate in elite café society. Most immigrant families today do what newcomers have always done: slowly, often painfully, but quite assuredly, embrace the cultural norms that are part of life in the United States.

The Historical Record

Prejudice and preconception lie behind most commonly heard accusations that contemporary immigrants are not assimilating. A centuries-old tradition of misreading immigrants has accompanied each new wave of newcomers. In the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin had misgivings about German clanishness and unwillingness to mix with outsiders. In the mid-nineteenth century, nativists worried that Irish Catholics would not only resist assimilation into a predominately Protestant society, but would also serve as agents for the papacy.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the presumed "racial" foreignness of Eastern and Southern European immigrants, as well as newcomers from East Asia, heightened concerns about their prospects for integrating into American life. Following the then-current rage for "scientific" cultural stereotyping, many considered these immigrants, including Jewish

immigrants, intellectually and morally incapable of properly integrating into American life.[2] With their severe disadvantages of low education and high poverty levels, they seemed destined to become denizens of ethnically segregated communities, part of what we would today describe as a "permanent underclass."

Assimilation—residential, cultural, and sociological—is not now, and has never been, an instant transformation in which an immigrant suddenly becomes a "full-fledged American."

Few would dispute that the seed of Germany, Ireland, Japan, China, and the Russian Pale has gradually been absorbed into the American mainstream. Racial, educational, and religious differences may have persisted, but the absorptive capacity of American culture ultimately prevailed, to the honor and benefit of the wider society.

Assimilation and Its Limits

Rarely do immigrants immediately discard the language, symbols, and tastes of their countries of birth upon arriving in the United States; often they retain some characteristics and loyalties—whether in the form of worship, food, or holidays—for generations to come.

Assimilation—residential, cultural, and sociological—is not now, and has never been, an instant transformation in which an immigrant suddenly becomes a "full-fledged American." Rather, it is a long-term, sometimes multi-generational, process that to some extent is never-ending.

Almost all Americans carry some of their ethnic past with them. Yet few would argue that a third-generation Italian-American cheering for a Milan-based soccer team, a Japanese-American *sansei* learning about tea ceremonies, or a descendant of a turn-of-the-century Jewish American celebrating Hanukkah rather than Christmas exhibits a deep-seated desire to undermine the essential unity of American culture or society.

Viewed through the prism of history, contemporary arguments about today's immigrants and their assimilative patterns are a motley blend of traditional assertions and misconceptions. As has been the case for much of the past century, the most disturbing complaint centers upon race. British-born journalist Peter Brimelow argues that because a majority of contemporary immigrants are not white, they can never assimilate into what is at its core a "white country."[3]* Perennial U.S. presidential contender Pat Buchanan openly expresses his concern that newcomers are responsible for a "dilution" of this country's European heritage.[4]

The Role of Ethnic Enclaves

The more common complaint, however, focuses on the tendency of many immigrants to congregate with each other after arriving in the United States. As in earlier centuries, the volume of

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* Nearly one-half of post-1960 immigrants are classified as Hispanic in the 1997 Current Population Survey and one-fourth are of Asian origin.

new immigration has given rise to sizable ethnic enclaves in several American cities. Immigrant havens such as Los Angeles, New York, Houston, San Francisco, Miami, and Washington, D.C., are dotted with "Little Indias," "Little Havanas," and "Little Manilas." Dominicans have carved out a niche in Washington Heights in Manhattan. Salvadorans cluster in Washington, D.C.'s Adams Morgan district. Los Angeles and New York each have their unique versions of "Koreatown." Larger groups such as the Vietnamese and Chinese have left their imprint not only on neighborhoods, but on entire suburban cities—for example, Westminster in Orange County, California, and Monterey Park in Los Angeles County.

This phenomenon is nothing new. Throughout this country's history, immigrant communities have always clustered in specific cities and states. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, immigrants and their children composed absolute majorities of the country's urban population.[5] Immigrants from Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Germany once created ethnic-specific enclaves in the Midwest. Polish immigrants transformed Chicago into the second-largest Polish city in the world. Italian and Irish immigrants clustered heavily in the Northeastern corridor. Jewish immigrants were once overwhelmingly located in New York. Japanese clustered in Los Angeles and Honolulu.

Today, as in the past, some immigration alarmists see the seeds of secessionist movements within immigrant enclaves. Yet judging from the historical evidence, the tendency of immigrants to live together in ethnic neighborhoods does not in any way signal active resistance to, or resentment of, mainstream U.S. culture.

Judging from the historical evidence, the tendency of immigrants to live together in ethnic neighborhoods does not in any way signal active resistance to, or resentment of, mainstream U.S. culture.

To be sure, these communities do seem "exotic" to many native Americans, with stores emblazoned with strange words, restaurants serving unfamiliar foods, and clubs playing different kinds of music. Yet these sights, smells, and sounds do not reflect a conscious rejection of American culture and society. The immigrant enclaves of today, like the enclaves of the past, simply serve as way-stations for the first generation of newcomers. They are necessary for people who often do not speak English as a first language and need the comfort of familiar people, sounds, and institutions. In this sense, enclaves serve to ease the newcomers' transition and, more importantly, that of their children, as they struggle to gain a foothold in their new country.

Focusing on the Immigrants

The process by which the U.S. shapes and changes the lives of immigrants has received far too little attention. To date, the vast majority of contemporary research on immigration focuses on how newcomers affect the U.S., particularly in economic terms. Yet immigrants do not live as financial aggregates or in economic models; they are human beings trying to adjust to often radically different conditions in a new country.

Even for the best-prepared newcomer, immigration can be a very traumatic process. The struggles of resettlement in a foreign land can subject an individual or a family to tremendous stress. Uprooting oneself or one's family from a familiar surrounding filled with extended family, friends, and social networks can be disruptive and alienating. As author Oscar Handlin once wrote, "the history of immigration is the history of alienation and its consequences."[6]

These impacts can be felt in the most intimate and personal of ways. What were once customary modes of behavior are no longer adequate in the new environment. Immigrants are forced to forge new relationships and to find new meaning in their lives, often under harsh economic circumstances.

An individual's culture is often erroneously viewed as a fixed quantity. An immigrant may continue to speak with friends or listen to the radio in his native language, but this does not prevent him from simultaneously acquiring English.

From this perspective, it is easier to understand why many immigrants—past and present—have chosen to live in familiar ethnic enclaves. These communities help immigrants adapt to their new country by mitigating the cultural impact and providing crucial new networks of jobs and information. The enclaves simply represent a logical intervening step toward the ultimate goal of integrating into American life.

The Path to Assimilation

For most immigrant groups, and the vast majority of immigrant families, self-segregation weakens with time and with each succeeding generation. Economic progress helps to speed up this process. Today's Asian and Latino immigrants tend to move into more mainstream, integrated neighborhoods as they move up the economic ladder. As immigrants and their children come to afford better housing, they choose neighborhoods with more amenities over areas with neighbors of the same ethnicity.[7]

Eventually, we begin to see the ultimate in assimilation: intermarriage. Today most of the children and grandchildren of first generation Greek, Polish, and Slovakian newcomers, groups once considered "unassimilable," have intermarried with members of different immigrant groups—so much so that most of their descendents are themselves amalgams of at least two or three ethnic strains. That phenomenon is being repeated by today's Hispanic and Asian immigrants and their descendents.

The Role of Language

Even before full-scale assimilation occurs, the presence of self-contained immigrant communities does not keep these groups from gradually integrating into the larger society. An individual's culture is often erroneously viewed as a fixed quantity. An immigrant may continue to speak with friends or listen to the radio in his native language, but this does not prevent him from simultaneously acquiring English in order to communicate with people outside his immediate community.

One clear case of misunderstanding revolves around the use of Spanish by the growing population of Latin-American immigrants. Their continued use of Spanish has been widely misinterpreted by a wide range of activists—from contemporary immigration reform advocates to overzealous marketers and ethnic ideologues—as a refusal to learn, or a rejection of, English.

The dramatic rise of Spanish-language media does not negate the assimilation process, but simply reflects the current high levels of immigration from Latin America. The growth of Spanish music and talk-radio stations is, in a sense, simply an extension of the traditional ethnic enclave into what mass-media expert Marshall McLuhan called "acoustic space;" it does not suggest the creation of a separate, permanent Spanish-speaking counter-culture in America.[8]

In reality, today's Latin-American immigrants are simply following the traditional pattern of linguistic assimilation. The immigrant generation learns enough English to get by, but continues speaking the native language at home. Over time, the first generation's loyalty to the mother tongue gives way to an overwhelming preference for English among their children. The children of immigrants tend to be bilingual, yet thoroughly English proficient. By the third generation, the original language is lost in the majority of immigrant families, and English becomes the mother tongue for subsequent generations.

The Immigrant Impact on Mainstream Society

Assimilation does not mean that Latin-American and other newcomers do not influence American society. Assimilation is not a one-way process; U.S. culture is constantly changing and adapting to immigrants, just as immigrants adapt to it. We see this in parts of the country where the cultures of particular ethnic groups have become part of the local tradition. The bratwurst served at County Stadium in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as well as the presence of a large beer industry in that city, reflects Milwaukee's long history of German immigration.

Similarly, the mainstream society in the Southwest has adopted many Mexican features, both in its names of places and in its food. Local cuisines in California and Texas, for example, are derivative of Mexican influence. The impact of Jewish immigrants in New York is palpable throughout the city—not only in its cuisine, but also in the cadence of its language and the extensive use of Yiddishisms by many New Yorkers, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Similarly, no city in America celebrates St. Patrick's Day as fervently as the deeply Irish-influenced Boston, where Italian, Jewish, and non-white Bostonians also celebrate the holiday with zeal.

Assimilation is not a one-way process; U.S. culture is constantly changing and adapting to immigrants, just as immigrants adapt to it.

In future generations, the process that turns Boston green will also color the cultural identity of other cities. Nowhere is this process clearer than in Miami, once an Anglo retirement haven, now a city with a distinctly Cuban-American edge. Los Angeles seems destined to become—

culturally and politically, as well as demographically—a largely Mexican-American city. San Francisco takes on an ever more obvious Asian, predominately Chinese, character.

The American Commons

Although large concentrations of certain ethnic groups will give these and other cities new cultural, linguistic, aesthetic, and even phenotypic traits, they will all remain quintessentially American cities. Assimilation does not mean, and has never meant, conformity to a fixed, homogeneous American culture. The nation remains, in the words of sociologist Nathan Glazer, "the permanently unfinished country."[9]

American assimilation has taken place not in the lecture halls or in Congress, but on the streets, in the factories, and the social halls; it is fundamentally protean, ever-adjusting, and profoundly *ad hoc*.

What is needed most today is a new understanding of assimilation. Advocates—whether cultural nationalists or nativists—frequently prescribe how immigrants should or should not adapt to the United States. However, history shows that immigrants rarely have assimilated in the ways prescribed by intellectuals or politicians. Attempts to coerce them into following particular patterns—or to convince them to reject perceived coercion—have often failed. American assimilation has taken place not in the lecture halls or in Congress, but on the streets, in the factories, and the social halls; it is fundamentally protean, ever-adjusting, and profoundly *ad hoc*.

Immigrants come to America to improve life for themselves and for their families. As they benefit from this country's political and economic opportunities, they typically want their families to adopt commonly shared customs, attitudes, speech, and ideals that promote their further well-being within the United States.

Nevertheless, immigration to the U.S. does not require the obliteration of ethnic identity, as hoped for by nativists. It simply means that there are basic concepts—equality under the law, due process, economic opportunity—that people of differing backgrounds adopt. These commonalities, and not the total "melting down" of ethnic identities, are why the nation has been able to absorb more than sixty million immigrants since 1820 without dissolving into a federation of ethnic fiefdoms.[10]

Despite the many attempts to link "Americanness" to a single racial, religious, or ethnic group, America's promise lies in its liberation from Old World notions commingling political and ethnic identities. The United States is not a single-race enclave; it is a vast commons shared by a multitude of peoples. As Walt Whitman wrote in 1855, "America is the race of races."[11]

Rootedness

If immigration is the story of uprooting oneself from one's country of origin, then assimilation is the story of putting down roots in one's country of choice. "Assimilation" refers to a variety of adjustments that newcomers make to their new environment. In 1930, pioneering sociologist Robert E. Park wrote that social assimilation is "the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence."[12]

In other words, assimilation is about people of different racial, religious, or cultural backgrounds not becoming homogenous, but coming to believe that they are part of a larger family of Americans. To become a part of that larger family, a person or group must develop the sense that one's personal fortune is inextricably intertwined with the fortunes of the nation as a whole. It is this sense of interdependence that ties us together as a single nation.

Whereas immigration itself can be reactive—a response to pressures in the home country—becoming a citizen is quintessentially proactive. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that naturalized citizens tend to have a positive outlook on the United States. Once naturalized, immigrants also take on a more active role in the civic life of the country.

In this report, we identify four quantifiable indices of immigrant rootedness—citizenship, homeownership, language acquisition, and intermarriage. Using these criteria, we can gauge to what extent contemporary immigrants are actively assimilating into U.S. society. We rely primarily on data from the 1990 census, because that gives us the most complete picture of the rootedness of individual immigrant groups. In comparing differences in intermarriage rates between generations, we use data from the 1994 Current Population Survey, conducted by the Census Bureau, because the 1990 census does not contain that information.* In the section introducing each index, we refer to other sources of data both to draw comparisons to immigrants of the past and to update the information gathered in the 1990 census. The 1990 census data on these four indices of assimilation are unequivocal evidence that today's immigrants *do in fact* assimilate into U.S. life.

Citizenship

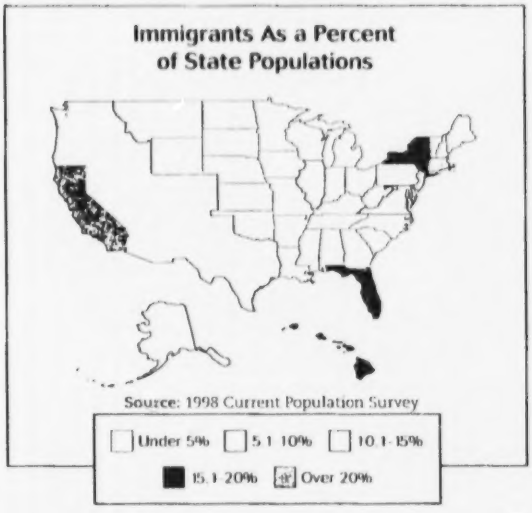
Background—Acquiring Citizenship Yesterday and Today

The most symbolic sign of immigrant rootedness is becoming a United States citizen. Citizenship applicants must declare their intention to reside permanently in this country. The requirements for naturalization involve a minimum of five years residence in the U.S., renunciation of previous national loyalties, basic knowledge of United States history and government and the English language, and consent to the provisions of the U.S. Constitution.[13]

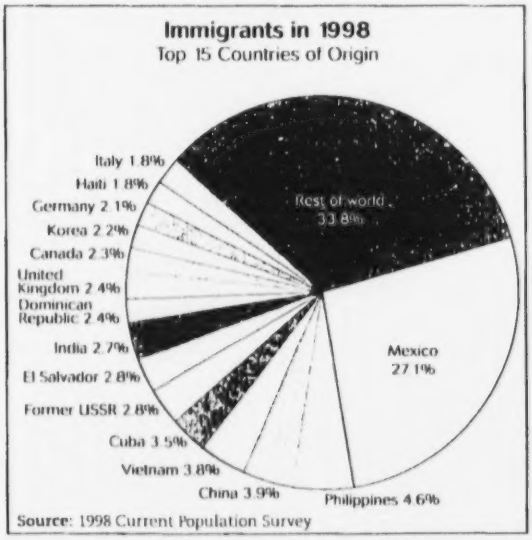
* A more detailed discussion of the data can be found at the end of this report.

Immigrants Today

Where They Come From and Where They Live in the U.S.



In 1998, there were more than 26,281,000 foreign-born persons in the United States, representing 9.8% of the total U.S. population. Of these immigrants, 67.2% had arrived in the U.S. before 1990, with almost a third (32.8%) settling between 1990 and 1998. Mexico was the number one country of origin in 1998: just over one in four (27.1%) immigrants residing in the U.S. were of Mexican origin. The Philippines (4.6%) was the second most common country of origin, and China (3.9%)—including Hong Kong—was third. Vietnam (3.8%), Cuba (3.5%), and the former Soviet Union (2.8%) were the fourth, fifth, and sixth most common countries of origin.

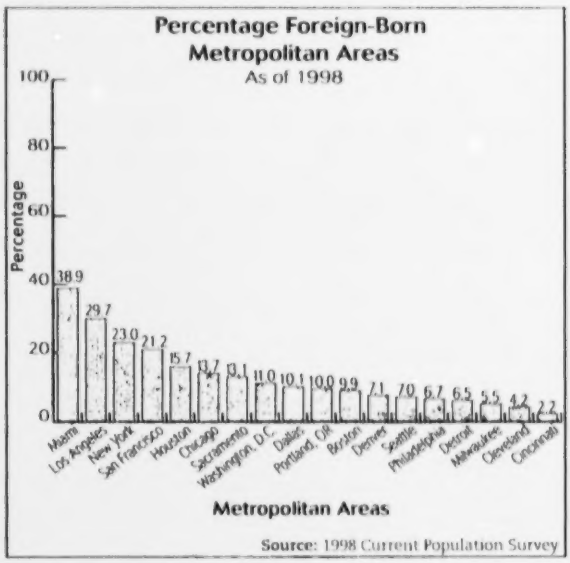


Just as in past immigration, today's foreign-born population is not distributed equally throughout the country. Nearly one-third (30.3%) of all immigrants reside in California. Altogether, six states are home to 70.7% of the nation's immigrant population: California, New York (13.8%), Florida (8.8%), Texas (8.8%), Illinois (4.5%), and New Jersey (4.5%). Twenty-eight states of the Union have experienced relatively insignificant immigration, with immigrants making up less than 5% of their populations.

A disproportionate number of immigrants are concentrated in the nation's two largest metropolitan areas. Los Angeles (18.2%) and the New York metropolitan area (which includes parts of New Jersey and Connecticut, 17.6%). More than one-third of the nation's immigrants

are clustered in these two urban regions. Miami-Fort Lauderdale (5.4%), the San Francisco Bay area (5.3%), and the Chicago metropolitan area (4.3%) are the third, fourth, and fifth largest immigrant concentrations in the country. The top five most heavily foreign-born urban areas of the country account for half (50.8%) of the nation's immigrants.

Percentage-wise, Miami-Fort Lauderdale (38.9%) is more heavily populated by immigrants than any other metropolitan area in the country. At 2.2% and 4.2% of their populations, respectively, Cincinnati and Cleveland have the lowest percentage of foreign-born residents of any major metropolitan region in the country.

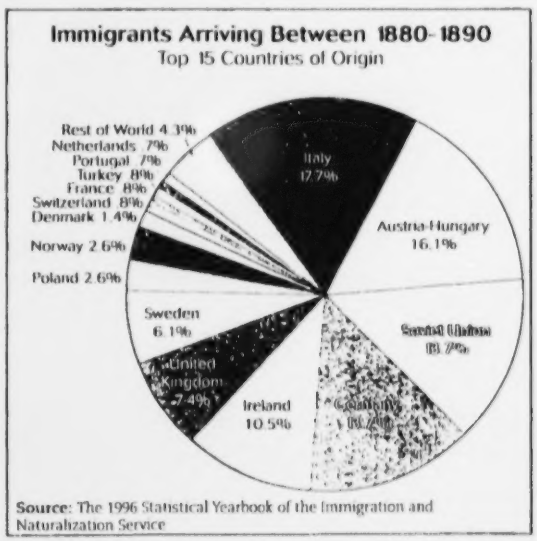


Source: 1998 Current Population Survey

Fast Facts:

Immigration now and immigration 100 years ago:

- In 1998, immigrants were 9.8% of the population of the United States.
- In 1900, immigrants were 13.6% of our population.
- In the 10 years prior to 1990, 3.1 immigrants arrived for every 1,000 U.S. residents.
- In the 10 years prior to 1890, 9.2 immigrants arrived for every 1,000 U.S. residents.[14]



Source: The 1996 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

Macarena Tamayo-Calabrese
Chicago, Illinois

Macarena Tamayo-Calabrese and her siblings came to the U.S. from Quito, Equador in 1973 to join their parents who were already living here. Her fascination with the American system of government inspired her to become an attorney.

Tamayo-Calabrese says that immigrants participate in every facet of American life and can be found in every type of employment. But attaining citizenship has a special meaning for them. *"For immigrants like me, becoming a citizen is final confirmation that we are an intricate part of the American fabric,"* she says.

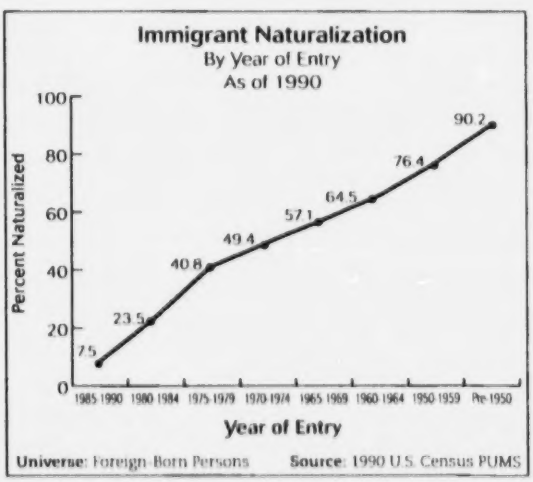
Whereas immigration itself can be reactive—a response to pressures in the home country—becoming a citizen is quintessentially proactive. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that naturalized citizens tend to have a positive outlook on the United States. Once naturalized, immigrants also take on a more active role in the civic life of the country.[15]

Citizenship is not a step that all immigrants take. Many Americans assume, for example, that all immigrants at the turn of the century became naturalized *en masse* when they arrived in the U.S. But the truth is that only about half of all immigrants have availed themselves of citizenship for most of America's history. At the turn of the century, about half of all immigrants were naturalized; in 1990, 40% of immigrants were naturalized.[16]

Naturalization rates have always varied widely by group and region of origin. The overwhelming majority of Irish, German, and Jewish immigrants became citizens. But Italians and Eastern European immigrants were far less likely to naturalize.

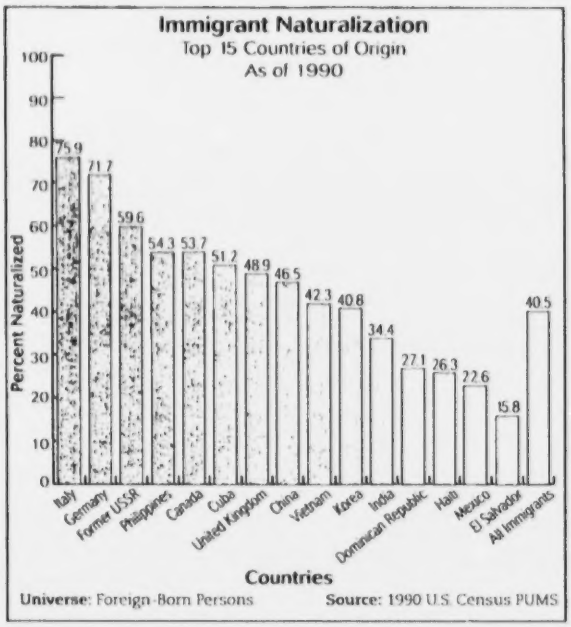
Sociologists have theorized that social class, education, and the relative distance and political conditions of the country of origin are all critical factors in determining naturalization rates. Jewish immigrants, for example, had no country or safe haven to return to when they left Eastern Europe; Italians, Greeks, Poles, and others often planned from the beginning to return home.

Today, changing political conditions in the United States are also effecting a change in attitudes toward naturalization. The anti-immigrant campaigns in California and in Congress in the last five years have been partly responsible for inspiring the greatest rush to naturalization in the history of the United States.[17] The 1990 data in this report will not reflect it, but immigrant naturalization rates—particularly for Mexicans—are rising, suggesting an even greater willingness among this large immigrant group to put down roots. In 1996, there was a 212.3% increase in Mexican immigrant naturalizations over the previous year. Accounting for 24.4% of total new citizens, Mexico was the leading country of origin for naturalizing immigrants in 1996.[18]

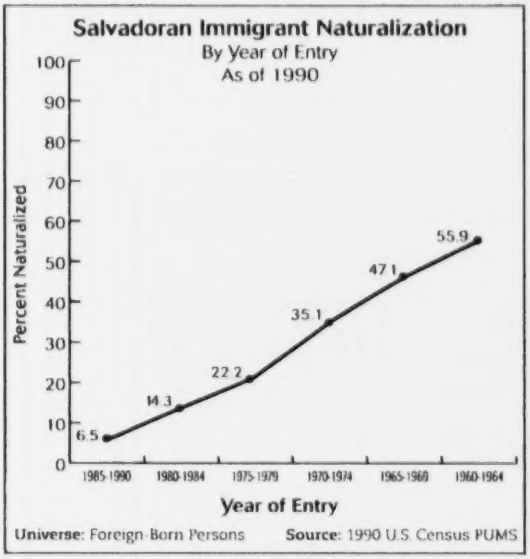


FROM THE 1990 CENSUS

In 1990, more than three-quarters (76.4%) of immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for forty years were naturalized citizens.



The longer immigrants reside in the United States, the more likely they are to become U.S. citizens. Only 7.5% of immigrants who arrived in the U.S. in the late 1980s were naturalized by 1990.* That number jumps to 23.5% for those who arrived in the early 1980s and to 40.8% for those who came in the late 1970s. Immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for twenty to twenty-five years were more than seven times more likely to be citizens than were recent arrivals. Immigrants who had resided in the country for forty years or more were twelve times more likely to be citizens than were recent arrivals. Fully 90.2% of immigrants who had been in the U.S. since before the 1950s became citizens by 1990.

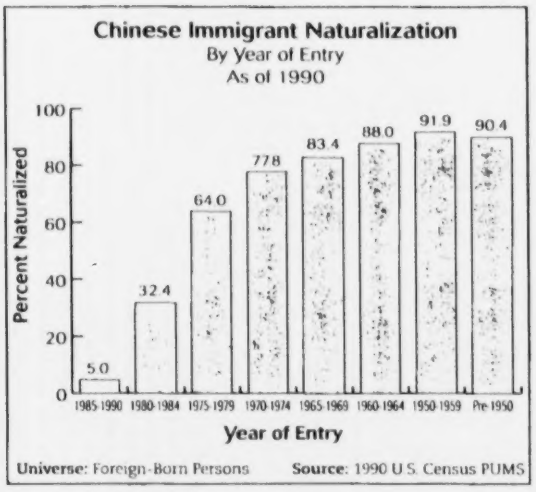


In short, with each additional five years of residence in the United States, an immigrant becomes considerably more likely to become a citizen. Indeed, among thirteen of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, the majority of newcomers were naturalized within thirty years of arriving in the U.S.

In 1990, 40.5% of all immigrants were citizens of the United States. Of immigrants from the fifteen most common countries of origin, Italians (75.9%) and Germans (71.7%) were the most likely to be naturalized. Immigrants in these two groups were also the most likely to have been in the U.S. for many years. Of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, Salvadorans were the least likely to be naturalized (15.8%). In 1990, Salvadorans were also one of the groups who had resided for the least amount of time in the United States. In addition, a large percentage of Salvadorans had temporary status and were not yet permanent legal residents eligible for citizenship. Mexican immigrants were the second least likely group to be naturalized in 1990.

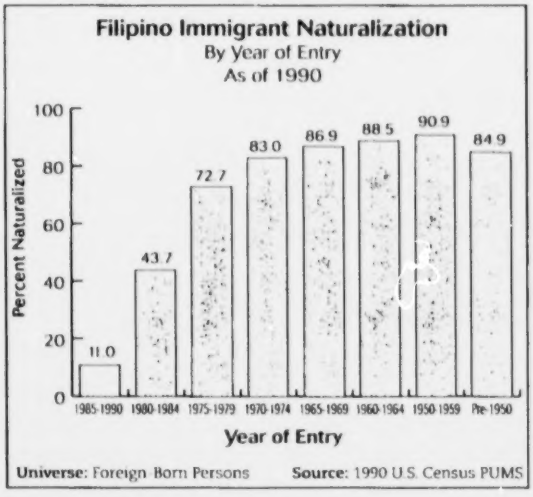
A look at each group's year of entry to the U.S. reveals a more dynamic picture of the naturalization process. Even Salvadorans, the group with the lowest overall percentage of naturalized citizens in 1990, show a remarkable increase in naturalization over time. While only 6.5% of Salvadoran immigrants who arrived in the late 1980s were citizens in 1990, 55.9% of those

* Immigrants are not eligible for citizenship for at least five years—with the exception of those married to U.S. citizens—and recent immigrants are therefore expected to have low rates of naturalization. Furthermore, census data do not distinguish between documented and undocumented immigrants. Hence, naturalization rates are skewed downward by the inclusion of immigrants who are not eligible for citizenship.



immigrants who arrived between 1960 and 1964 were naturalized by 1990.*

Mexican immigrants also show a healthy upward increase in naturalization over time. While only 8.6% of recent arrivals were naturalized by 1990, 61.8% of pre-1950 immigrants were citizens. Those arriving in the 1950s were five times more likely to be naturalized (47.3%) than were recent arrivals, and pre-1950 immigrants were seven times more likely to be citizens than recent arrivals. Filipino, Korean, Chinese, and Indian immigrants, and those from the former Soviet Union, all tend to naturalize quickly and at high rates. Most Vietnamese immigrants have resided in the U.S. for fewer years than the above-mentioned groups, but they, too, tend to naturalize quickly. While only 11% of recent Filipino immigrants were naturalized by 1990, 83% of those who arrived in the early 1970s were citizens. Likewise, 82.2% of early 1970s Korean immigrants were naturalized by 1990, and 79.4% of early 1970s Vietnamese immigrants had become citizens by 1990.



HOMEOWNERSHIP

BACKGROUND—BUYING A PIECE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Perhaps the most durable indicator of attachment to U.S. life is homeownership. For most Americans—native or foreign born—buying a house is the principal means of accumulating wealth. For the vast majority of families, there is no greater symbol of stability, permanence, and faith in the future.

If we look at data from the 1996 Current Population Survey, foreign-born persons who had arrived in the U.S. before 1970 had a homeownership rate of 75.6%, compared to the native-born rate of 69.8%.

Past studies and this report show unequivocally that the longer an immigrant remains in this country, the more likely he or she is to purchase a home. Overall, native-born Americans have a considerably higher homeownership rate than immigrants, but a longitudinal look reveals that foreign-born persons who have been in the U.S. for at least twenty-five years actually achieve a higher homeownership rate than the U.S. born.† If we look at data from the 1996 Current Population Survey, foreign-born

* In this report, we consider only periods of entry in which 5,000 or more immigrants arrived in the United States For example, very few Salvadoran immigrants came to the U.S. prior to 1960. Therefore, those years are not considered.

† Overall, more than two-thirds of native-born persons live in owner-occupied housing units, compared to less than half of the foreign-born.

persons who had arrived in the U.S. before 1970 had a homeownership rate of 75.6%, compared to the native-born rate of 69.8%.[19]

Demographically, contemporary immigrants are much more like the native population than was the case historically. Whereas immigrants before 1920 were predominately male and single, today's immigrants more closely resemble the U.S. population with regard to age, sex, and marital status.[20] In particular, contemporary immigrants' high rates of marriage presumably contribute to their propensity to buy homes.

Ben Monterroso
Los Angeles, California

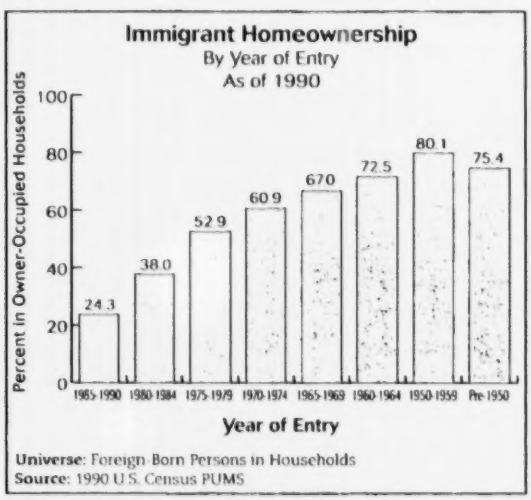
Ben Monterroso emigrated to the U.S. in 1977 from Guatemala. He became a U.S. citizen in 1995. He and his wife, an immigrant from El Salvador, have three children.

Monterroso bought his first home in 1985 and now owns a second one. He says that buying a home was an accomplishment for him and his family because their future is here in America. He wanted his children to have something that they could call their own. "*Now that I have a home, I can say that my family owns a little piece of America,*" Monterroso says.

FROM THE 1990 CENSUS

Within twenty years of arrival in the U.S., well over half (60.9%) of immigrants lived in owner-occupied housing.

While a little less than one-quarter (24.3%) of immigrants who had arrived in the late 1980s owned homes in 1990, 80.1% of 1950s immigrants resided in owner-occupied housing. Immigrants who had lived in the U.S. for twenty-six to thirty years were three times more likely to own a home than were recent arrivals. Among thirteen of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, at least two-thirds of families lived in owner-occupied homes after twenty-six years of residence in the U.S.*



Universe: Foreign-Born Persons in Households
Source: 1990 U.S. Census PUMS

Overall, a respectable 50.4% of all immigrant homes were owner-occupied in 1990. Of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, Italians (81.9%) and Germans (75.5%) were the most likely to own homes in 1990. Immigrants from the Dominican Republic were the least likely to own homes. The fact that Dominicans were highly concentrated in renter-dominated New York City may have contributed to this lower rate.

Of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, Italians (87.1%), Indians† (85.2%), and Filipinos (85%) made the greatest strides toward homeownership after twenty-six to thirty years of residence in the U.S. Even the immigrant group least likely to own their own homes in 1990 (the Dominicans) experienced a gradual increase in homeownership. While their homeownership rate was still not high (41.3%), Dominicans who arrived in the 1950s were four times more likely to be homeowners than were recent arrivals.

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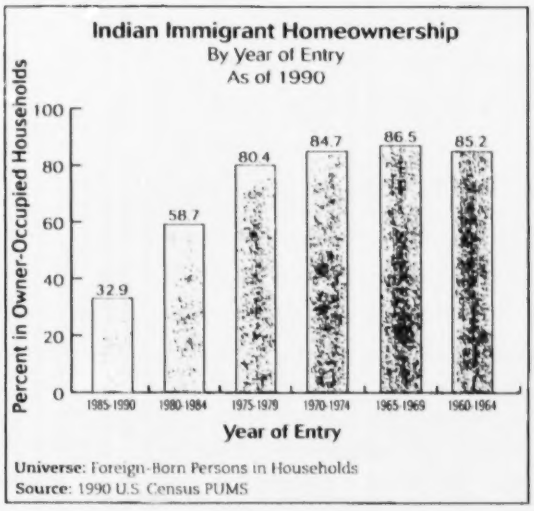
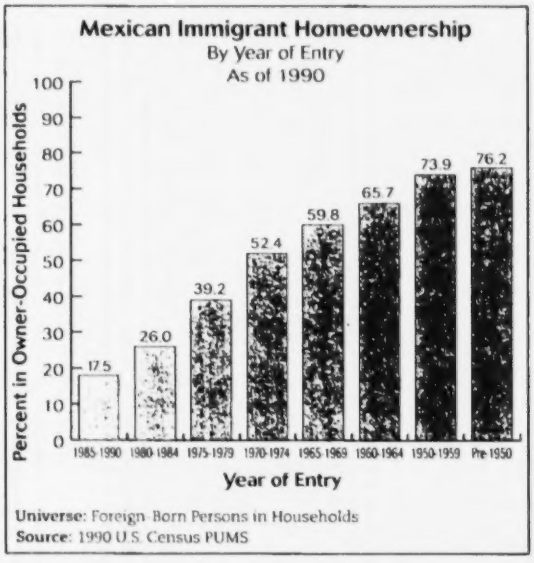
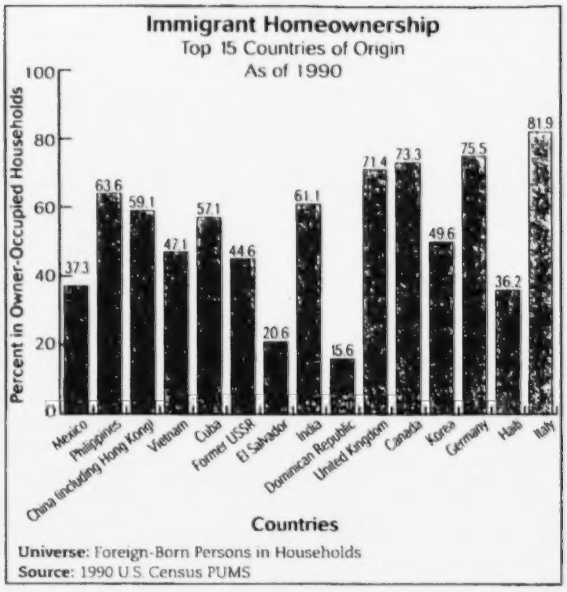
* The decline in homeownership for pre-1950 immigrants is most likely due to age-related frailties, retirement, and alternative housing arrangements. Homeownership for all householders tends to drop at about age 70.

† In this report, we consider only periods of entry in which 5,000 or more immigrants arrived in the United States.







Given their typically low socioeconomic status upon entering the U.S., Mexican immigrants attain home-ownership at a remarkable rate over time. Only 17.5% of Mexicans who had arrived in the late 1980s lived in owner-occupied units in 1990, but that percentage more than doubled to 39.2% among those who had arrived in the late 1970s. After twenty-six to thirty years of residence in the U.S., Mexican immigrants were almost four times more likely to own homes than were recent arrivals. Mexican immigrants who had arrived during or before the 1950s had very high homeownership rates—73.9% and 76.2%, respectively.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

BACKGROUND—MISCONCEPTIONS AND REALITIES ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH

Commitment to life in the United States can also be seen in the acquisition of English-language proficiency.[21] Learning English—the predominant language used in social discourse and in business transactions—enables immigrants to participate in such critical activities as getting an education, finding a job, and obtaining access to social services, as well as applying for citizenship.

The common contention that today's immigrants are more resistant to learning English than past generations is a misconception. At the turn of the century, an estimated 25% of the immigrant population could not speak English.[22] By contrast, in 1990, only 8% of all immigrants over the age of five could not speak English at all.

Another common contention, that the proliferation of foreign language media (particularly Spanish-language media) removes incentives to learn English, is not supported by the data. In reality, immigrants who arrive with few English skills tend, over time and with extended exposure, to acquire more. This is also true for immigrants from Latin America. Among all recent

immigrants from non-English speaking countries, 47% said that they did not speak English "well" or "very well" within roughly two years of arrival. Yet among those immigrants who had been here thirty years or more, 88% said they spoke English with high proficiency.[23]

Despite the obvious benefits of cultivating bilingualism within America's diverse population, sociologists have designated the U.S. as a "language graveyard."[24] In most cases, within a few generations after immigration the native language is completely lost and replaced by English.

From the 1990 census

Within ten years of arrival, more than three-quarters (76.3%) of immigrants spoke English with high proficiency.

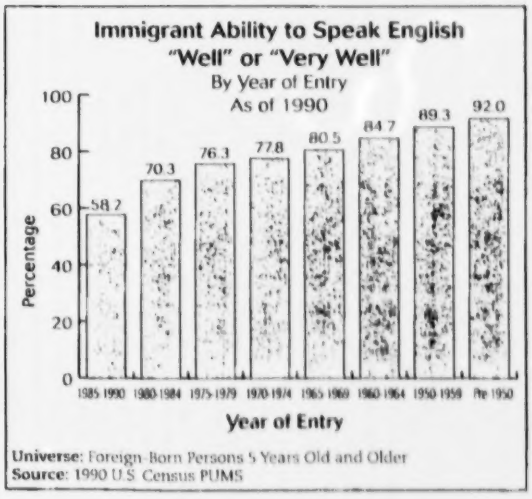
In 1990, a majority (58.2%) of immigrants who had arrived in the previous five years already reported speaking English "well" or "very well." Of those who had been in the U.S. since the late 1960s, 80.5% spoke English "well" or "very well" as of 1990. Of those who arrived before 1950, 92% spoke English "well" or "very well."

Not surprisingly, immigrants from English-speaking countries—Canada and the United Kingdom—reported speaking English better than immigrants from the other fifteen most common countries of origin. Filipino, Indian, and German immigrants—coming from countries where English is either a semi-official language or a commonly taught second language—also tend to speak English proficiently upon, or soon after, arrival.

Dr. Lucien Houenou
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Dr. Lucien Houenou came to the U.S. in 1988 to conduct medical research at Wake Forest University. He had previously fled civil strife in his native Benin, West Africa, and moved to France where he received his Ph.D. in biology. Although he spoke five languages, Houenou knew no English. Because he worked 16 hours a day in the lab, Houenou did not have time for English classes. So, he bought a television and learned English by watching cartoons.

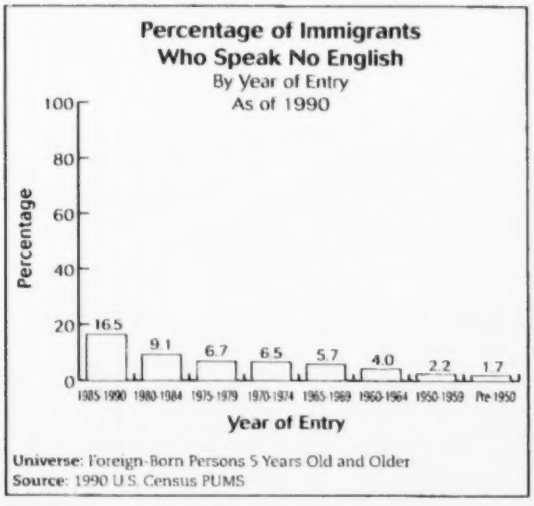
He has learned well. Houenou is now an Assistant Professor of Neurobiology and Anatomy at the School of Medicine at Wake Forest University and is working to find a cure to Lou Gehrig's disease and Muscular Dystrophy. Says Houenou, *"America provides me with such incredible opportunities and I hope that in some small way, I will be able to give something back."*



Universe: Foreign-Born Persons 5 Years Old and Older
Source: 1990 U.S. Census PUMS

Of immigrants from non-English-speaking countries, those from the former Soviet Union, Korea, and Vietnam tend to gain English proficiency most quickly. By 1990, 94.8% of Koreans who had arrived between 1965 and 1969 spoke English proficiently, while 92.1% of Vietnamese who had arrived in the early 1970s spoke English "well" or "very well." Of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who had arrived in the early 1970s, 84.5% spoke English "well" or "very well" by 1990.

A majority of immigrants from each of the fifteen most common countries of origin spoke English "well" or "very well" after ten years of residence in the U.S. Only



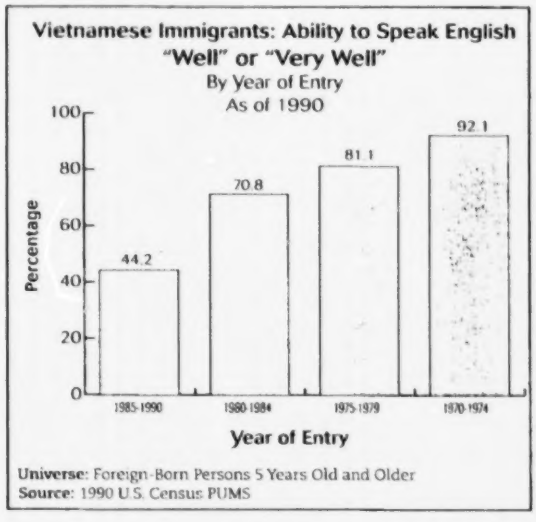
4% of immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for twenty-six to thirty years spoke no English at all, while a paltry 1.7% of long-established, forty-year-plus immigrants reported speaking no English at all.

The idea that non-English-speaking clusters remain over generations is simply untrue. Virtually all children of immigrants spoke English proficiently. Of second-generation Asian Americans aged five to seventeen, 93.9% reported speaking English "well," "very well," or exclusively. Nearly half (49.6%) spoke only English. By the third generation, fully 85.3% of young Asian Americans spoke only English, and 98.3% reported speaking English "well," "very well," or exclusively.

English Ability of Asian-American Children
By Generation
1990

Language Spoken at Home	1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd Generation
Only English	10.67%	49.56%	85.30%
Non-English Language at Home & Speaks English			
Very Well	44.88%	33.25%	9.72%
Well	26.28%	11.06%	3.30%
Not Well	16.04%	5.67%	1.52%
Not at All	2.14%	0.47%	0.16%

Universe: All children 5-17 years old living in two-parent households with at least 1 parent of Asian descent.
Source: 1990 Census PUMS



The same pattern could be seen among Latino youngsters residing in the United States. Although their households were much more likely to be bilingual than those of second-generation Asian Americans, 91.7% of second-generation Hispanic children five to seventeen years old reported speaking English "well," "very well," or exclusively. By the third generation, Spanish was much less likely to be spoken at home. Roughly two-thirds (65.7%) of third-generation Latino children spoke English exclusively, and 95.7% spoke English "well," "very well," or exclusively. There is evidence that Spanish is resilient and persists as a second language among Latinos in heavily Hispanic regions of the country, but this clearly does not retard the thorough acquisition of the nation's primary language.

English Ability of Hispanic-American Children
By Generation
1990

Language Spoken at Home	1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd Generation
Only English	2.93%	16.00%	65.74%
Non-English Language at Home & Speaks English			
Very Well	44.23%	55.07%	22.24%
Well	27.55%	20.60%	7.68%
Not Well	17.72%	7.32%	3.99%
Not at All	7.57%	1.01%	0.35%

Universe: All children 5-17 years old living in two-parent households with at least 1 parent of Hispanic descent.
Source: 1990 Census PUMS

INTERMARRIAGE

BACKGROUND—TRANSCENDING ETHNIC SEPARATENESS

Finally, there is the factor of intermarriage.* Americanization does not require the obliteration of ethnic identity, but it has long depended on the intermingling of peoples from a variety of backgrounds. Intermarried couples and their children are living testaments to the fundamental tolerance underpinning a multi-ethnic society.

Intermarriage is not only a sign that a person has transcended the ethnic self-segregation of the first years of immigration, it is also the most potent example of how Americans forge a common national experience out of a diverse cultural past.

Intermarriage is not only a sign that a person has transcended the ethnic self-segregation of the first years of immigration, it is also the most potent example of how Americans forge a common national experience out of a diverse cultural past. As Richard Alba wrote: "A high rate of intermarriage signals that individuals of putatively different ethnic backgrounds no longer perceive social and cultural differences significant enough to create a barrier to a long-term union. In this sense, intermarriage could be said to test the salience, and even the existence of a social boundary between ethnic categories."[25]

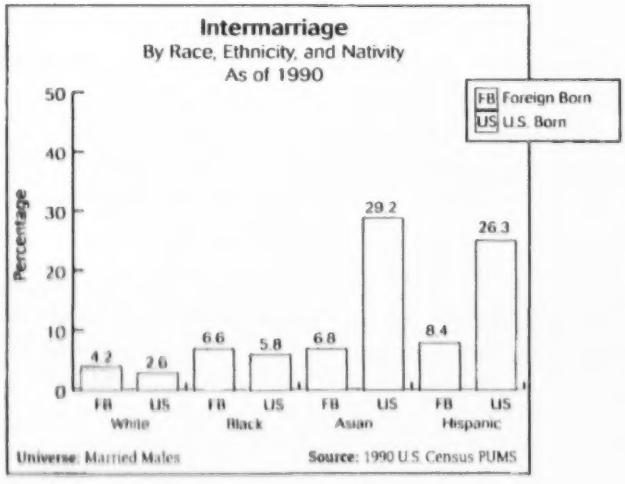
Put another way, intermarriage illustrates the extent to which ethnicity no longer serves to separate one American from another. It is the most basic way in which the nation achieves the multidimensional racial destiny predicted by Whitman. It is human testimony to the reality of *E Pluribus Unum*: Out of Many, One.

FROM THE 1990 CENSUS AND THE 1994 CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

Intermarriage rates for second- and third-generation Asians and Latinos are extraordinarily high.

In most cases, intermarriage is significantly more common among the children and grandchildren of immigrants than it is among the immigrant generation. Foreign-born Hispanics and Asians are significantly less likely to intermarry than are their U.S.-born counterparts. However, foreign-born whites and blacks are somewhat more likely to intermarry than their U.S.-born counterparts.

In 1990, 29.2% of married U.S.-born Asian males had non-Asian spouses, and 26.3% of U.S.-born Hispanic males were married to non-Hispanics. U.S.-born Asian males are four times more likely to intermarry than are foreign-born Asians.



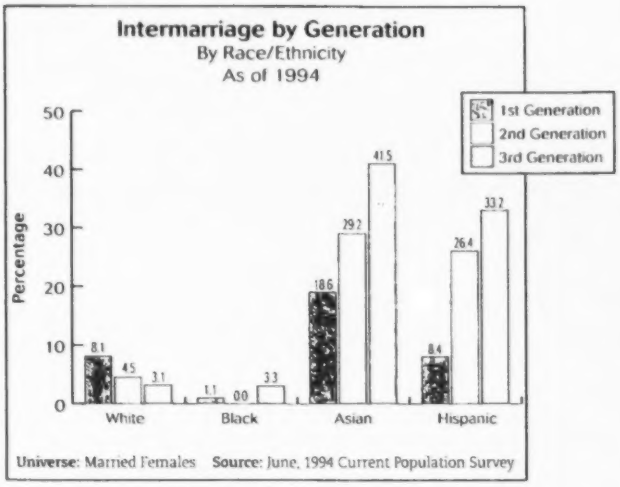
* For a definition of intermarriage, see note on methodology at the end of this report.

Bilal Omarjee and Bethzabet Chavez-Omarjee
Ft. Hood, Texas

Bilal, born in South Africa, and Bethzabet, a Hispanic American, were married on March 4, 1999. Beth is a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army and Bilal will soon be commissioned as an officer in the Army Reserves.

Bilal, whose family moved to the United States in 1989 when he was 16, says that this country has allowed him to fulfill many of his dreams, including service in the military. Bilal and his wife are united not only in marriage, but also in their dedication to serve their country. He says, *"For this country, both Beth and I are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice."*

U.S.-born Hispanic males are three times more likely to intermarry than are immigrant Hispanics.



The 1994 Current Population Survey allows us to look at the third generation—native-born children of native-born parents—of the four major racial or ethnic groups. A relatively high percentage (18.6%) of first-generation married Asian immigrant women had intermarried, 29.2% of second-generation Asian women had done so, and a phenomenal 41.5% of third-generation married Asian women had non-Asian spouses.

Similarly, the rates of Latino intermarriage increase tremendously over generations. In 1994, only 8.4% of first-generation women had intermarried, compared to 26.4% of second-generation Hispanic women. One-third (33.2%) of third-generation Hispanic women had non-Hispanic spouses.

Conclusion

By all available evidence, today's immigrants assimilate into U.S. life much like earlier waves of newcomers did. The proof exists not in the rhetoric of the heated battles over immigration, but in the data revealing the often overlooked, everyday lives of contemporary immigrants and their families.

Over the past few years, the debate over immigration has been dominated by extremist activists. Fully assimilated U.S.-born ethnic ideologues have assumed the role of spokespeople for millions of immigrants. Ironically, they often insist that newcomers should not embrace the very U.S. culture that they themselves have absorbed. On the other extreme, anti-immigrant activists, like generations of nativists before them, have espoused the mantra that contemporary immigrants are somehow fundamentally and behaviorally distinct from yesterday's newcomers. Yet even as the activists argue in the public eye, millions of contemporary immigrants quietly, steadily, and decisively assimilate into U.S. life.

A Note on Methodology

In assessing the four quantifiable indices of assimilation, we have chosen to rely on the 1990 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) rather than the 1998 Current Population Survey (CPS). Although conducted nine years ago, the decennial census is still the most reliable source of data on these indices. The overall raw numbers of immigrants have changed, but the basic characteristics of population groups and their fundamental behaviors have likely remained constant. Furthermore, the 1990 census was based on a huge sample with many immigrant respondents. The CPS, by contrast, used a much smaller sample. The more extensive 1990 sample allows us to extract data on individual immigrant groups with much greater confidence. In the case of English-language ability, we are obliged to use the 1990 census because the CPS did not collect data on that variable.

For intermarriage data, we rely on both the 1990 census PUMS and the June 1994 Current Population Survey. We use the 1994 CPS because it tracks generational differences, while the decennial census does not. In using the 1994 CPS, we do not extract data for individual countries because the sample size is too small to ensure accuracy. Instead, we break down the data into the four major racial or ethnic groups: White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic. Indeed, in this report we define intermarriage strictly as marriage in which a member of one of the four major groups crosses ethnic lines to marry someone from one of the other three groups. Finally, the June 1994 CPS collected data on intermarriage only for women.

For the most recent numbers of immigrants and where they reside in the United States, we rely exclusively on the 1998 CPS.

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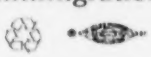

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